

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 SCCT-01 DHA-02 AID-05 CCO-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSC-05 SP-02 OC-05 OPR-02

PA-01 USSS-00 PRS-01 SCA-01 A-01 OMB-01 SS-15 SY-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 USIA-06 SCS-03 FBO-02 /087 W
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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9611

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 0603

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, BG

SUBJ: A NEW CONTROVERSY AT DACCA UNIVERSITY

REF: DACCA 0386

1. DACCA UNIVERSITY GOT A NEW VICE-CHANCELLOR ON JANUARY 31, BUT IN THE PROCESS, THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION (MLA) APPEARS TO HAVE GOTTEN ITSELF INTO AN EMBARRASSING, POTENTIALLY TROUBLING SITUATION. THE NEW VICE-CHANCELLOR IS DR. FAZLUL HALIM CHOUDHURY WHO IS VIEWED BY MANY, BOTH ON AND OFF THE DACCA CAMPUS, AS A "MUJIBITE". HIS APPOINTMENT, AN APPARENTLY UNINTENDED RESULT INsofar AS THE REGIME IS CONCERNED, HAS DRAWN CRITICISM ON THE MLA AND EDUCATION ADVISOR ABUL FAZAL, IN PARTICULAR, FOR PERMITTING THE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE JOB TO BE MADE BY A UNIVERSITY SENATE WHOSE MEMBERS WERE ALL APOINTEED DURING MUJIB'S REGIME. FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HALIM CHOUDHURY'S APPOINTMENT, A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WENT ON STRIKE JANUARY 31 AND CLASSES WERE NOT HELD YESTERDAY, CONFIDENTIAL

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FEBRUARY 2. SINCE SOME STUDENTS WERE ALREADY ANTI-

PATHETIC TOWARD THE MLA AS A RESULT OF ITS RECENT CRACK-DOWN ON THE CAMPUS (DACCA 0386) AND THIS NEW EVENT CREATES A FRESH GROUP OF DISAFFECTED, FURTHER TROUBLES AT THE UNIVERSITY, LONG THE WELLHEAD OF AGITATIONAL POLITICS, MUST BE EXPECTED.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE APPOINTMENT -- THE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY (THE PRESIDENT OF BANGLADESH) IS BOUND BY THE DACCA UNIVERSITY STATUTE TO APPOINT THE VICE CHANCELLOR FROM AMONG THREE PERSONS NOMINATED BY THE UNIVERSITY SENATE. IN NORMAL PRACTICE, CANDIDATES FOR THE JOB RUN AS THREE-MAN TICKETS, OR PANELS IN LOCAL PARLANCE, IN A SENATE ELECTION. DR. HALIM CHOWDHURY WAS ON A PANEL WITH FORMER VICE CHANCELLOR DR. MARTIN CHOWDHURY WHO WAS RELIEVED OF HIS POSITION ON SEPTEMBER 24, 1975, AND PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, DR. KABIR CHOWDHURY. ALL THREE MEN ARE CONSIDERED TO HAVE BEEN CLOSE TO THE AWAMI LEAGUE GOVERNMENT. ANTI-MUJIB ELEMENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY DID NOT WANT THE ELECTION TO GO FORWARD WITH THE CURRENT 100-MEMBER SENATE COMPOSED OF FACULTY, STUDENT AND PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES BECUASE THEY CONSIDERED IT STACKED IN FAVOR OF THE OLD REGIME. EDUCATION ADVISOR PROF. ABUL FAZAL, HOWEVER, WAS IN FAVOR OF HOLDING THE ELECTION NOW, ALTHOUGH HIS REASONS ARE UNKNOWN. THE BANGLADESH TIMES OPENLY CAMPAIGNED IN ITS NEWS COLUMNS THE PAST FEW WEEKS AGAINST THE PANEL OF THE THREE CHOWDHURY'S LABELING THEM AS SUPPORTERS OF THE OLD REGIME. SEVEN FACULTY MEMBERS OF THE SENATE RESIGNED LAST WEEK IN PROTEST AGAINST WHAT THEY SAID WAS THE SENATE'S FAILURE TO "REFLECT THE EDUCATIONAL VALUES AND HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE NATION" AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, WE HAVE BEEN TOLD, BOYCOTTED THE ELECTION BECAUSE THEY CONSIDERED THEMSELVES BADLY OUTNUMBERED BY THE MUJIBITES.

3. THE ELECTION MAY HAVE BEEN RUN ON AN INDIVIDUAL RATHER THAN A PANEL BASIS AS AN ATTEMPTED COMPROMISE BUT THE RESULTS WERE THE SAME IN ANY CASE: THE THREE CHOWDHURY'S WERE THE TOP VOTE-GETTERS. PRESIDENT SAYEM HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO APPOINT ONE OF THEM AND HE APPEARS CONFIDENTIAL

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TO HAVE SELECTED THE LEAST CONTROVERSIAL OF THE THREE. (HALIM CHOWDHURY WAS DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF SCIENCE AT RAJSHAHI UNIVERSITY AND HEAD OF THE APPLIED CHEMISTRY DEPARTMENT BEFORE BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION IN 1974.)

4. OPPOSITION TO THE APPOINTMENT STIRRED A STRIKE BY STUDENTS ON SATURDAY WHICH CONTINUED MONDAY, FEBRUARY

2; IT IS UNLIKELY THAT CLASSES WILL RESUME TODAY. A MISSION OFFICER WHO VISITED THE CAMPUS MONDAY SAID THAT THE GATES WERE PADLOCKED AND STUDENTS WERE MILLING ABOUT, BUT HE SAW NO SIGN OF ANY PROCESSIONS OR AGITATION. ANOTHER COURCE TELLS US THAT SOME STUDENTS HAVE BEEN AGITATING AND HAVE LABELLED HALIM CHOWDHURY AN INDIAN AGENT.

5. COMMENT. THE EFFORTS OF THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION TO MEET THE GRIEVANCES OF THE STUDENTS MAY BE UNDERCUT BY THE SELECTION OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR. THE OUTCOME OF THE SENATE ELECTION IS OBVIOUSLY AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION, BUT THERE APPEARS TO BE NO WAY TO UNDO THE DAMAGE WITHOUT HARMING THE MLA'S REPUTATION FOR UPHOLDING THE LAW. IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT FORMER JURIST SAYEM WOULD SANCTION ANY EFFORT TO RESCIND THE APPOINTMENT WHICH WAS CARRIED OUT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CHARTER OF THE UNIVERSITY. WHAT IS CALLED INTO QUESTION, HOWEVER, IS THE POLITICAL JUDGEMENT OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT OR AT LEAST THAT OF PROFESSOR FAZAL WHO SEEMINGLY FAILED TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION WAS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION, GIVEN THE COMPOSITION OF THE SENATE, AND THAT THE ELECTION WOULD BE USED BY INTERESTED PARTIES TO CLAIM THAT A SIZEABLE PRO-MUJIB SENTIMENT EXISTS AMONG THE INTELLECTUAL ELITE OF DACCA. BOSTER

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